



WASHINGTON COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

1302 Pennsylvania Avenue • Hagerstown, MD 21742

www.health.maryland.gov/washhealth

Percolation Test Preparation

1. The property owner or applicant is responsible for the preparation of percolation test holes.
2. Before digging any percolation test holes or observation trenches, it is recommended that the applicant or landowner consult with a sanitarian to determine whether the soil type is considered to be seasonal or unacceptable for testing. **The testing period for seasonal soils is generally February 15 to April 30, but may vary based on seasonal weather conditions.**
3. An observation trench, dug to a minimum depth of seven feet, is necessary for tile field area evaluations. Four feet of filterable material beneath the installation must be exposed. When a limiting factor such as rock or a water table is encountered, approval cannot be given. Most new lots in the limestone regions of the county require a minimum of four trenches; the number may vary based on hydrogeological findings. It is recommended that the applicant or landowner consult with a sanitarian to determine the number of observation trenches required and direction of the trenches to be dug before doing any excavating.
4. A minimum of six percolation test holes shall be dug within the proposed absorption area. Holes shall be spaced on 15- to 25-foot centers on two rows with a minimum of three holes in each row. All percolation test holes must be within a 50-foot radius of the soil profile excavation. The location of the percolation test holes is to be determined and specified by the Approving Authority.
5. The circular holes should be dug or augered with a uniform diameter from 12 to 15 inches. If a power auger is used to dig the holes, extra precaution should be taken as to not alter or artificially smear the soil sidewalls. The depth of the holes shall be equal to the proposed depth of the base of the absorption area. Percolation test hole depths for conventional installations will range from 24 to 36 inches, pending the presence of a limiting condition.
6. The bottom and sides of each percolation test hole shall be thoroughly scarified with a knife blade, chisel, or other sharp, pointed object. This is done to counter the artificially disturbed soil interface which resulted from digging the hole. After scarifying the hole, all loose material shall be removed from the sides and bottom.
7. Each hole shall be presoaked with water by the property owner or applicant. Approximately 8 - 12 inches of water shall be carefully added to each hole, 12 to 24 hours before the percolation test is scheduled to be conducted.
8. After the holes have been presoaked, the property owner or applicant shall provide a minimum water supply source of five gallons for each hole to be tested. Where no direct water source is available, a 30- to 55-gallon barrel is recommended. Containers must be clean of residue and water should be relatively free of solid or liquid impurities.
9. When the percolation test holes and the observation trench(es) are ready for testing, contact the Environmental Health Division at 240-313-3400. When the percolation test has been completed, the property owner or applicant is responsible for properly backfilling each percolation test hole.
10. When percolation tests and the observation trench(es) are satisfactory, the water supply is properly located, and the plat requirements are satisfied, the permit will be issued. A \$150.00 fee is required for a percolation test and a separate fee is required for the permit for the installation of the septic system, payable to the Washington County Health Department. All applicable regulations of the Maryland State Department of the Environment must be satisfied (regulations governing individual sewage disposal systems and individual water supplies).

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